

Filed for intro on 05/14/2001

SENATE JOINT RESOLUTION 312
By Miller J

A RESOLUTION To honor the memory of Judge James Curwood Witt, Sr.

WHEREAS, The members of this General Assembly were greatly saddened to learn of the death of Judge James Curwood Witt, Sr.; and

WHEREAS, Judge Witt was an exemplary public servant and consummate professional who worked assiduously to improve the quality of life for his fellow citizens in numerous capacities; and

WHEREAS, Judge James Witt, the third child of Beecher and Lendora Keirn Witt, was born April 8, 1921 in Monroe County; his maternal grandfather, from Pennsylvania, moved his family to Tellico Plains to build railroads; his paternal grandfather, Hezekiah Bascom Witt, served as Monroe County Judge; and

WHEREAS, Although Judge Witt's father was proud to call himself a "mountain man," Beecher Witt left his native Coker Creek to study at Grant University, which is now Tennessee Wesleyan College; Beecher Witt earned a law degree in 1913 and went on to serve as the Mayor of Tellico Plains; he later completed Hezekiah Bascom's term as Monroe County Judge,

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served as District Attorney General of the Fourth Judicial District from 1926-58 and was the Republican nominee for Governor of Tennessee in the 1952 election; and

WHEREAS, A distinguished athlete and scholar, Judge James Curwood Witt, Sr. pursued his undergraduate studies at Maryville College, where he was an outstanding wingback for the Scots' football team; and

WHEREAS, After graduating from Maryville College, Judge Witt enlisted in the United States Military; he honorably and bravely served in the United States Coast Guard on board the *U.S.S. Cambria* as a Coxswain in the Pacific Theatre during World War II; he also served with distinction as the Commander of a LST craft, landing invasion troops onto occupied beaches; and

WHEREAS, Upon being honorably discharged on September 28, 1945, Judge James Witt returned to school, and earned a law degree from Cumberland University in 1947; and

WHEREAS, In 1958, James Curwood Witt, Sr. was elected Criminal Court Judge in the same district in which his father had served, the Fourth Judicial District; he presided over many homicide trials and on seven occasions presided over trials that resulted in the imposition of the death penalty; he soon become known as a reformer of the criminal court system in southeast Tennessee; and

WHEREAS, An exemplary public servant, Judge Witt, after his retirement from the Circuit Court bench, in 1982, began serving as a specially-assigned judge; hearing cases in every judicial district in Tennessee, he replaced local judges who were unwell or disqualified, always utilizing his unique blend of experience and vision; and

WHEREAS, During an extended stay in Memphis, he implemented procedures that expedited court proceedings, particularly in the area of jury selection; his changes prompted a Memphis newspaper to call him the "Whirlwind from the East"; many of his ideas have since been adopted and implemented by the Shelby County trial courts; and

WHEREAS, On January 16, 1997, Judge James Witt had the pleasure of swearing in his son, James Curwood Witt, Jr. as a Judge for the Tennessee Court of Criminal Appeals; two years later, a three-judge panel, which included Judge James Witt, Jr., convened in the Monroe County Courthouse to hear appellate arguments; this event marked four generations of judges in the Witt family to have held court in Monroe County; and

WHEREAS, Having a great love of sports, Judge James Curwood Witt, Sr. served as a TSSAA football official for several years; he stopped officiating to be able to attend his son's high school football games and his daughter's high school band activities; a talented golfer, he coached Madisonville High School's golf team in the mid-1960s; he had a life-long affection for fly fishing, and quail hunting; he also fostered a bloodline of Brittany Spaniel gundogs and bred and raised Tennessee walking horses; he was particularly fond of his black mare, "Sassy"; and

WHEREAS, Judge Witt's greatest sporting interest was the University of Tennessee Volunteers football team; for nearly 50 years, missing only a few home games, he cheered the Vols in victory and defeat; representative of his positive attitude toward life, he always believed that, regardless of the odds, or the score, the Volunteers would triumph; and

WHEREAS, A well-rounded gentleman, Judge James Witt was an adept carpenter, electrician, plumber, and mechanic; he had also developed skills in clock-making, golf club construction, and stained-glass art; he wrote one full-length manuscript of fiction and at the age of 75 began taking guitar lessons; and

WHEREAS, All his accomplishments aside, Judge James Curwood Witt, Sr. was most blessed by the love and companionship of his sweetheart and wife of 53 years, Gloria Patterson, and their three beautiful children, James Curwood, Jr., Kathy Lendora, and Cindy Lee; and

WHEREAS, Judge Witt will also be greatly missed by his son-in-law, Stanley N. Wilhite, husband of Cindy; a daughter-in-law, Carole Cavender Witt, his brother, R.B. Witt, Jr.; his sister, Judith W. Netherton; nine grandchildren, Christy Hall, Andria Parker, Lisa H. Queener, Mary C.

Witt, James Curwood Witt III, Thomas Benjamin Wilhite, Jeffrey Nathan Wilhite, John Bascom Witt, and Gloria Catherine Wilhite; and one great-grandchild, Emma Grace Queener; and

WHEREAS, An active and devout member of the First United Methodist Church in Madisonville, Judge James Witt served faithfully for many years as a Church School Teacher, Opening Assembly Meditation Leader, and as Superintendent of the Church School; and

WHEREAS, A highly respected member of his community, Judge James Curwood Witt, Sr. was the epitome of the compassionate neighbor and responsible citizen; a wonderful human being, he was loved and admired by all who were privileged to know him; and

WHEREAS, Judge Witt regularly visited people who were in poor health or spirits; after his death, many people recounted hearing Judge Witt whistling as he approached their front doors carrying a jar of homemade soup or a box of doughnuts; one of them recalled, "he was a wonderfully kind man"; and

WHEREAS, Judge James Witt leaves behind an indelible legacy of integrity and probity as a jurist, compassion and loyalty in his private life and diligence and dedication in all his chosen endeavors; and

WHEREAS, It is fitting that this General Assembly should pause to remember the bountiful life of this exceptional public servant and human being; now, therefore,

BE IT RESOLVED BY THE SENATE OF THE ONE HUNDRED SECOND GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF TENNESSEE, THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES CONCURRING, That we honor the memory of Judge James C. Witt, Sr., reflecting fondly upon his impeccable character, his stalwart commitment to his family and community, and the courage and honor with which he served justice, and celebrate the beauty and joy that was his bountiful life.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, That we express our sympathy and offer our condolences to the family of Judge James C. Witt, Sr.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, That an appropriate copy of this resolution be prepared for presentation with this final clause omitted from such copy.